

## DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR.

### BUREAU OF EDUCATION.

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## THE USE OF ACTIVITIES IN THE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL.

A REPORT OF THE FIRST ANNUAL MEETING OF THE NATIONAL COUNCIL OF PRIMARY  
EDUCATION, DETROIT, MICH., FEBRUARY 22, 1916.

### INTRODUCTORY STATEMENT.

By ELLA VICTORIA DOBBS,  
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A few persons interested in the organization of primary teachers assembled at Cincinnati in February, 1915, at the time of the meeting of the department of superintendence. The group consisted of 30 representative women from various parts of the country. Finding themselves of one mind, they decided to take immediate steps toward an organization which would stand for a greater use of activities in the primary school, more freedom of method, and a closer cooperation with the kindergarten and with the grades above.

It was desired to bring together all persons whose interest touches the primary school at any point, including not only primary teachers and supervisors but also teachers of special subjects whose work includes the primary grades, principals of buildings, superintendents, and patrons. That the organization might have the benefit of the breadth of view of these various groups the invitation was limited only to interest in primary education. In order to centralize responsibility and avoid the delay which often comes from inability of members of committees living in different places to act promptly it was decided to have but one officer for the first year. This chairman was to have power to call to her assistance any member of the organization, and all agreed to respond promptly. This promise has been faithfully kept.

It was decided at the Cincinnati meeting to form an elastic organization which would devote itself to informal discussions rather than set programs. It seemed better to make every effort to have the problems in which the organization was interested discussed on general programs which would be heard by a mixed group of people rather than to concentrate upon additional programs for the narrower group. It was decided also to attempt to bring about a greater cooperation in communities through the formation of local groups for the study of local problems. Several such groups have been organized. It was also urged at a meeting in Oakland that effort be made to investigate the extent to which the various forms of "activities" are in use in the advanced schools of the country. To this end an informal investigation has been inaugurated.

## EXPERIMENTATION IN THE SCHOOL OF CHILDHOOD.

By MEREDITH SMITH.

*Director of the School of Childhood, University of Pittsburgh, Pittsburgh, Pa.*

The keynote in education in this country to-day is experimentation, discovery, search for new and better methods and equipment, and more adequate subject matter.

The School of Childhood of the University of Pittsburgh offers an unusual opportunity for conducting an educational experiment. In the first place the teachers are free to carry on the work in the way they consider best, unhampered by a ready-made course of study or by the necessity for making the work of one year a direct preparation for that of the succeeding; thus attention may be centered on the needs of the child at each particular period. The school is small and there are no purely administrative problems or difficulties that must be taken into consideration.

Two years ago the work was instituted with the younger group, children from 4 to 6 years of age. This year the school has been enlarged and the problem of the primary grade is under way. The plan is to carry the children on from one year to the next in the endeavor to work out a consecutive scheme of education.

The aim is not to impose adult knowledge and accomplishments on children, but to afford experiences that appeal to them on their own account and at the same time have educational value and significance. The school situation is one in which things are done, and a form of activity carried on that is continually demanding the exercise of the child's own initiative and power. School studies find their place in this scheme as the means by which ends may be more successfully and effectively realized.

The material that constitutes school studies, Dr. Dewey has shown, originated in experience; it grew out of the problems that came up in relation to what people were doing, the activities they were carrying on. In guided educational play the same thing is true in regard to the experience of children. Reading, writing, number, phases of physics, nature study, geography, etc., appear in their experience and have significance and meaning because of the relation thus afforded to social life and to human wants and needs.

The usual mistake in education is to give children subject matter that has been abstracted from experience, organized in a logical, adult way, and then expect them to master this ready-made material just as it stands, unrelated to any use or purpose which it may have. These things have value to adults only in so far as they assist them to attain their ends. When school studies are put back into experience where they appear as means to desirable ends, children have a motive for acquiring them and mastery is thus facilitated.

Where things are being done there must be material provided to do with. To meet this need the primary room and the room devoted to the younger children are supplied with large floor blocks, peg-lock blocks, trains, dolls, hammers, etc. There is a fair amount of floor space which the children keep about two-thirds covered with their constructive representations the greater part of the time. They preserve what they have made from day to day, adding to it as they work out their ideas more fully. Just now they have what they call the "City of Pittsburgh," with its houses, stores, an apartment house, and all the play and incidental construction work that goes with it. Each child has an occupation of some kind that he or she is engaged in, building construction, housekeeping, manufacturing, mercantile business, railway and steamship construction and management.

Very early in the midst of these experiences the need for money as a medium of exchange arose. The tickets for the steamship were \$1 or 50 cents, according to the location of the seat in the bow or stern of the boat. The children made their own money and incidentally learned to make numbers. Some writing was necessary in labeling the tickets and also in labeling the articles in the various stores.

The problem of transportation was one that absorbed a great deal of interest and attention. The question of how certain things are packed for shipping was considered, and it was found necessary on one occasion to telephone to a grocery store to verify experience and to get further information. Barrels were made of pumpkins, apples, etc., (Hailman heads), and sacks for flour, rice, coffee, nuts, etc., which the children brought from home.

As the packages brought were opened and examined they led to talks of how different products grow and where they come from. The sacks had to be labeled because when they were tied the contents could not be identified. This made further need for writing and, consequently, reading. The children decided on labels 1 inch by 2 and cut these out with the aid of a ruler.

One morning a storekeeper was urging the railway manager to send up the supplies lying in the station which she had ordered, but he persisted in an attitude of stoical indifference and inattention which was finally accounted for by this statement: "You can't talk to me; I'm 5,000 miles away." The question was asked: "How can she get word to you?" He replied: "She will have to telegraph." Two stations with telegraphic apparatus were constructed, thumb tacks being used for keys, the message was sent, and in due time the supplies were delivered.

Dr. Dewey has analyzed reasoning as a process that takes place when in the pursuit of ends presenting some difficulty we form an inference or hypothesis of possible means of solution and, acting on the basis of that inference, we prove or test it, and thus verify or nullify it. This is the method of science, the method of progress, of getting at the new, the unknown. It is the method that is applied not only to scientific discovery, but to every experience in which human beings are adjusting themselves to new situations, or in which they are attaining new ends or purposes in daily life and occupations.

In play of this character a continual demand is made upon the child for the exercise of reflective thought or reasoning. A child's ends are different from an adult's and his control of means is slight, but his mind acts in the same way and is developed by the same process. When a child who is endeavoring to construct a water tank for his engine says, after search, "Oh, this block will make it," he has formed an hypothesis for the solution of his problem, and as he acts on this inference, he tests its worth, checks up the reasonableness of his conclusion, and thus develops the power of judgment.

It would seem from the prevailing scheme of education that it is assumed that the child's mind is of a very different character from the adult's, that it has somehow a peculiar power of absorbing a wide variety of facts of knowledge and of storing them for future use. A large part of this knowledge is forgotten, much of it is of no value to children or adults, and phases of it become obsolete by the time the child is grown; yet many hesitate to eliminate any of it for fear perhaps the child will not become as cultured as he might have been.

Any normal adult can at any time gain new facts or knowledge that he may desire, but mental habits and attitudes once formed are difficult to break. It is upon the formation of efficient mental habits and attitudes that attention should be focused, for with this development acquisition of knowledge will take care of itself. Even though a child's ends are play ends, this habit of initiating ends, of



forming correct inferences, and of executing purposes, is being formed, and increasingly his ends will be more complex, more remote, and thus require greater organization and control of such means as reading, writing, number, etc., for their attainment. Under guidance, after having found a need for the school arts, the children abstract these from experience and enjoy practice or drill on them for the purpose of developing skill.

The children in the School of Childhood are learning to be resourceful and inventive, are developing the power of initiative, ability to conceive ends that are desirable and a mastery of the means that make efficient attainment possible. Each child's action is in the main directed by his own mind, not another's. This does not mean that the teacher is not guiding the situation, but she does it by means of suggestion which makes her guidance just another of those agencies from which children are continually gaining suggestion for activities they choose to carry on. Hers should be more educative because designed for that purpose. It is seldom realized to how great an extent in the majority of schools to-day the child's activity is governed by another mind, by rules and regulations he has had no part in establishing and for which he sees no value. He may not even speak or leave his seat without permission. One is reminded of Rousseau's warning to the parents and teachers of his day. "You will stultify him by this method," he says, "if you are always directing him, always saying to him, go, come, stop, do this, do not do that. If your head is always directing his arms, his own head will become useless to him."

Besides the intellectual development afforded by this kind of experience, where children are freely playing and working together, there is opportunity for real social development and training. The children recognize the need for adjusting themselves to other persons if they would successfully attain their own purposes, and they learn how to cooperate with others for the advantage of all.

The freedom of movement permitted, the lifting and carrying of blocks from one place to another, together with the use of the gymnastic apparatus, afford opportunity for physical development and bodily control.

The children will not be able to read as other first-grade children do, but they are gaining what is of more value to them, the formation of mental and social habits and attitudes and the development of physical health and power. Because of this development, ability to read will be attained with much less strain on the part of children and teachers as well.

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### A PLAN CONDUCTIVE TO GREATER FREEDOM.

By ANNA LOGAN,

*Assistant Superintendent of Schools, Cincinnati, Ohio.*

Activities! Freedom! We are only on the threshold of freedom. We see these little children coming to the first grade so full of activity—activity which we curb at once by placing them in rows of seats. Yet we hope that they will attain their fullest possibility of development in this artificial environment! How shall we change the situation?

I go back in thought to a gathering of primary teachers and kindergartners years ago in our city, on which occasion there came to us the first suggestion of the possibility of carrying over the kindergarten activities into the primary grades. Although every first-grade teacher looks with longing upon the freedom of the kindergarten, wishing to have the same atmosphere, how does she use that which she has?

Imagine the crowded conditions in our cities. The rooms are so filled with row after row of seats, that there is little room, little chance for freedom, for activity. Yet the teacher reaches out in the dark. Do you hear her direct the children to get out their boxes of letters to form words and sentences? How wasteful of time and energy the performance is! It is unnecessary to explain to this audience that it is not only wasteful but harmful. It is bad from the physiological standpoint, because the handling of these letters calls for greater coordination of muscles than the child at this stage possesses. It is likewise bad from the psychological standpoint of habit formation, for the child has learned as yet no standards to measure results. Look at his choice of "m's" for "n's," his confusion of "p's" for "b's" and "d's." How does the teacher correct these results? Hear her comment after passing a few desks: "Now, children, get out your boxes, put away the letters, be careful not to drop any on the floor."

The kindergartens of seven schools were overcrowded. There was a long waiting list of children asking admittance. As there was no vacant room in any of these buildings, it was planned to have morning and afternoon sessions, with different teachers in charge of each.

The kindergartners and primary teachers are on the same salary basis; therefore the number of teaching hours must relatively be the same. Thus the problem arose of filling profitably the time of the kindergartners, who in this scheme would be employed only half a day. None of their accustomed social duties was to be omitted; home visiting was not to be neglected; no planning of mothers' meetings was to be changed. These were too important assets to be slighted. Yet with the mothers' meetings, conferences, visiting, etc., there were some unemployed hours. How should these be used?

The most profitable plan seemed to be to ask these splendidly trained kindergartners to help the overworked primary teachers. A meeting was held one afternoon to discuss all sides of this proposition. There was objection on the part of some of the primary teachers. They said: "We do not want to teach before the kindergartners." The results in most cases, however, have proved that this was an unnecessary dread. For while the teacher is teaching one group her companion is rendering valuable aid in supervising the other group. But greater good has been accomplished than this. To be worth while the content of the formal school subjects must be based on real experiences. The homes and streets of our crowded down-town districts afford an extremely limited horizon for these basal experiences. Now, through the assistance of the kindergartner, excursions are possible. The value of excursions had always been known, but there were "too many lions in the way" for them to be feasible.

One of the first and most delightful of the trips was to the park in the vicinity of the school, where every child had an opportunity last fall to help plant bulbs. That may seem insignificant; but who knows what it means to a child? Last September a table in one of our schoolrooms was covered with the products of the children's gardens. A little boy stood looking wistfully at the blossoms. He remarked, "If I had all of those flowers, I should think I was in heaven." If each child places a bulb in the ground and has the wonderful experience of seeing it bud and blossom, it is giving him a glimpse of heaven.

The next visit was to the markets. There the class could see the products that had been brought in from the country. They could begin to catch an idea of the source of some of their food supply. The garden and farm are no longer unknown quantities to them.

Another day they went to the library to see the pictures of Eskimo lands. Books and pictures were shown and a story told by the librarian. One of the

children asked, "May we not sing our Eskimo song?" And the walls rang with the childish voices as they offered their gift in return for the kindness of the librarian. On the way home a blacksmith's shop was visited. Here a different world was revealed. Through other excursions many experiences have been added which have vitalized the regular school work of reading, language, and arithmetic.

When the children returned to their room they were eager to tell or express in various ways what they had seen and done. The results were crude, but were the genuine outgrowth of these tours into the new and fascinating scenes. Through games, dramatization, and handwork again and again were portrayed the pleasures and knowledge gained. The desks and aisles were no great hindrance, the children themselves frequently suggesting adaptations.

In "tripping across the way to see what his neighbor was doing," some one would propose that instead of playing this, as it was played in the kindergarten, the aisles would be streets. So back and forth they would skip, representing the various occupations seen. The very limitations and hindrances afforded fine opportunities for arousing initiative.

When "Puss in the corner" was played, there being no available corners, two or three circles were drawn on the floor. Four children would stand on each circle, calling to the one in the center, "Poor Pussy! Poor pussy!" He answered: "Pussy wants a corner!" As opportunity afforded those on the circle exchanged places. If "Puss" could gain one of the places, the one who lost must be "Puss."

So it can be readily perceived that greater freedom and more activity than ever existed before in these first grades has been gained, because of the supervision by the kindergartners, of games, songs, dramatizations, occupations, and excursions. The primary teachers recognize the help that has come to them. The kindergartners voice their enjoyment in watching the development of the children.

Though there are many problems not solved in this cooperation, in the attempt to make the solution we feel there has been growth; that the school seems more like life. "The people perish who have no vision." We are hoping for at least a glimpse of the vision that will lead to the wonderful widening of the horizon of these children whose needs are so great.

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## ONE PUBLIC SCHOOL TEACHER'S TRANSFORMATION.

By RACHEL E. GREGG,

*Supervisor of Training, State Normal School, Harrisonburg, Va.*

I will tell you this morning of the transformation that has taken place in a teacher in one of our public schools in Virginia. She came to us this year with a very strong recommendation as an excellent primary instructor and supervisor. During the first week of school, when I visited her room, I was very much astonished to see all the children sitting still in their seats and not a single child looking up to smile at me when I came into the room. When I went the next week it was the same: the children were sitting quietly with their hands behind their backs. The next time I went it was before school in the morning, when the children usually are active, talking to each other, and enjoying themselves. There they all sat perfectly still. I said to them: "Are you sick this morning, children? What is the trouble?" But they did not speak, because they had received no permission. I hardly knew what to do with the situation, because several criticisms from students had come to me



about the room. They said: "This is not what we expect in a primary room; what are we to do when we teach there?"

In the course of the conversation the teacher informed me that at her normal school she had been told not to smile or permit any freedom among children during the first month. I suggested to this teacher that she should go to the association meeting in Richmond at Thangskiving, and she did. When she came back she asked me whether I would be willing to have the desks taken out of the room and some tables put in. I told her I would be very glad to have that done and arranged the matter accordingly. But conditions were not appreciably changed when I visited the school again. The children still were seated in their seats very quietly. I remarked: "Why don't you let them build a house? Not a house built for a doll nor a playhouse, but one that will represent a proper plan of a house that a child would want to live in." *So they began to build a house.* I would like you to see the transformation that has gone on in that room. I went in the other day; it was after the 9 o'clock bell had rung, and no one heard me come into the room, so interested were they in different things. The student teacher was in the corner examining something that they had just made. The teacher had really forgotten that the bell had rung. Others were over in another corner looking at something which a child had brought to put in the house. The house itself is rather crude. The teacher objected to it at first, but each time I went into the room I asked her how much the children had done and how much she had done. I was afraid it might become rather a sore point after a while, but now each time she tells me, "I really did nothing except to bring the material here." Other times she said: "I have not even brought the material; the children have brought everything needed and have planned these particular pieces of furniture for the house."

This represents a condition existing in many parts of the country. It is a difficult situation, because it is hard to convince teachers of the value to be found in some vital thing of this character rather than in a book.

Another noteworthy fact is that parents are so much more interested in the school work than they were before. Fathers of the children had sent word that if anything was needed for the house they would be very glad to furnish it. Different articles have been sent from the children's homes. One little child had a box of tools given him for Christmas. The box of tools was brought to the schoolroom, and is being used in the building of the house. One little child had an idea and suggested that it would be better to paint the furniture for the bedroom white. I had insisted that very little money be expended, and that they keep an exact account of every cent which was spent, because I rather feared the tendency of the teacher would be to make a very beautiful house, and I was trying to guard against expense. The little children said, "We want to furnish the bedroom in white. How are we going to have the furniture white?" Next morning when the teacher came in she found a little package on her desk, and upon opening it found a box of white enamel paint and a brush. The child had gone home and mentioned the fact and the father had bought a box of paint and sent it to the school.

It means a great deal to have that condition existing there. It means a great deal if the parents have an interest in these activities, because the traditional school is the thing in which they believe; but when the parents of children realize that much is gained from the natural activities of life it is a step in the right direction in the schoolroom. It means more to that community than anything else. It means the opening up of a field of activities that are needed

in the children's lives. It means that parents are willing to have their children play folk games. It means that they will appreciate the value of music and drawing and other phases of education outside the traditional settings.

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### COOPERATIVE LETTERS.

By ISOBEL DAVIDSON,

*Supervisor of Primary Instruction, Baltimore County, Md.*

This autumn, in addressing a gathering of teachers, I asked, "What can we do to help each other in the solution of this problem of applying the social motive in school work? How can we help each other to better interpretation?" One of the enthusiastic girls said, "It would be interesting for each one of us to write a letter to you, embodying a frank, informal résumé of some classroom experience in which the social motive has been significant. Any letter unusually rich in suggestion could be read or, better still, printed and distributed to the group. This interchange of experience would tend to give us inspiration and renew our courage to better endeavor."

I replied, "Very good, indeed. But why would the *letter* help?"

The answer came from the group, "A letter is personal, individual, social. We are tired of making formal reports. An informal report would give us an opportunity to express ourselves freely quite as if we were talking with you about something which we have enjoyed and wish to share with others."

As it is pleasant to anticipate letters rather than to be swamped with a deluge of correspondence at one time, it was suggested that the groups be divided into relays, each relay to send in letters at certain designated intervals. Thus it began; a cooperative plan for the purpose of strengthening the entire teaching body in the rational application of motivated work.

Suggestions were given, as follows: Incorporate in your letter your purpose and plan of procedure, showing how you link the child's purpose with your own; the motivation of each problem and the reaction of the children noted; evaluate the results; include samples of children's work, such as letters, oral and written composition, handwork; snapshots of social situations, if these aid in clarifying your statements; cooperation of other classes, individuals in the community and others; anything which will show gain in social efficiency.

Many of the letters have proved interesting, showing, as they do, the teacher's grasp of the situation, strong or weak, as the case may be, dependent upon her point of view, her mode of attack, and—vision. Some have presented the smaller and yet no less significant situation of the *socialized recitation*, reporting lessons in reading, language, literature, arithmetic, spelling, nature, etc., indicating the added gain to the school in the social spirit throughout, the increased interchange of class groups and grades from the lowest to the highest. Others have taken the larger social situation and shown how the daily classroom work in the various subjects has been motivated in relation to it, as, for instance, preparing for an assembly, a birthday party, a pioneer party, a "special occasion," Thanksgiving, Christmas, and other festivals.

A fourth-grade class became a coherent working unit, through the problem of creating a play from the Viking tales, at first for their own enjoyment, then for other classes, and later for invited guests of the community. The making of the play occupied several language and literature periods, with story-telling, oral composition as well as written, taking the form of prologue character sketches, letter writing, invitations, dramatization, versification, music. The



making of costumes, begun in the classroom, became an out-of-school activity entirely without urging. All of this served to stimulate the boys and girls in the attainment of better voice control, improved oral speech and reading, and all the rest. But the most interesting thing in the whole situation to those of us who were observing the progress of the work was the fact that interest was maintained for a long time after the initial event by the pupils themselves. It had become a part of their lives. They lived the story again and again, by means of a bit of costume worn as they went about their work, e. g., to find each little girl transformed into a Gyda by a golden headband, spread a kind of halo about ordinary doings of the day—and out-of-school performances followed as a matter of course. After an interval of a month or more the class was invited to present the play again, but such dissatisfaction with their product was now voiced by the class leaders that the only solution was revision of the play. This was done. Again the reconstruction and presentation held class interest, and they felt repaid when snapshots of the various scenes were taken and presented to them as souvenirs of their effort.

The ever-present doll house was another problem presented; it showed the results of motivated work extending over a long period of time. The doll house serves so many purposes. In this instance it was used to serve as a medium for expression activity along all lines relating to the problem of shelter; the playhouse served as a basis for the reading, language, handwork, all made fascinating around this center of interest. The school furnishes some material, but not all that is needed, nor should it do so. The children brought hatboxes, bits of lace, cloth, tinfoil, etc., from their homes for the purpose. The making of the house and the furnishings occupied a period of three or four weeks, possibly six, and culminated in a school assembly to which different grades were invited in turn. Not only had they found joy in the work from day to day, not only were they looking forward to the fun they could have with their product, but they were eager to share the results of their individual and community efforts with others in the school. Second grades came to view. Eighth-grade students came to hear these little people talk of their achievement, to see the work of their hands. Class spirit and school pride were strengthened by this very simple attempt to interpret in rational terms the social motive in school work.

Another letter contained a most interesting report of an occasion which might be called "Little Sisters' and Brothers' Day." This teacher conceived the idea of entertaining the prospective "next year's crop," as she graphically termed them. To this end the children of the first grade worked most earnestly—in reading, to read well; in story-telling, singing, games, to do their very best when "little sisters and brothers came to school." A bit of sweet was to be served, so little baskets were made and napkins fringed by the little folk now grown big after a year at school. You can imagine the wee guests and all the rest. There was a program, with games in which all could take part; there was a party. The purpose of the teacher was to give the incoming class a glimpse of that happy place—the school—to establish a friendly relationship through this one happy afternoon which would give zest to work when school days really began. It has something in it worthy of consideration.

The finest piece of motivated work is resulting from the local history problem. In this all the teachers and children of the third grade, assisted by some of the teachers of the grammar grades and interested persons of the community, are working upon the problem of history material for the third grade. A number of pioneer parties or auld lang syne occasions are on the

way toward culmination as the outgrowth of daily lessons in which excursions to historic spots, use of the camera, history stories, oral and written, original verse, dramatization will play their part.

Instances could be multiplied but that is unnecessary. Enough has been given to make it clear that there has been an added impetus to a better interpretation of the principle of motivation in school work through the cooperation of the teachers. The value lies just here, does it not, that the teacher through her own effort and desire to be of service has found a new viewpoint and a new vision?

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## CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES CONNECTED WITH THE THREE R'S.

By ELIZABETH HALL,

*Assistant Superintendent of Schools, Minneapolis, Minn.*

A question may be raised as to whether freedom of activity is not too frequently thought of as associated with things done with hands and with certain kinds of material which are not conventional school material.

Many children in a room create a problem. About four years ago the first and second grades were divided into three groups instead of two, and the practice was begun of letting these groups go outdoors by turns. When the teacher desired to recall them, some signal was put in the window or a child was sent out for them. When pupils were permitted to go out and play out of doors they would come back refreshed and ready for work, and it was immensely better for them than to be handed the usual seat work.

It was found, too, that the parents were delighted with this freedom of the children when they saw the advantages which were being gained. Our climate is not the sort that lends itself advantageously to an experiment of this character because it is extreme for many months of the year. That led to the cleaning out of storerooms and the establishing of playrooms.

One group is assigned a study lesson, the assignment being partly verbal and partly from directions on the blackboard. When those children have finished that assignment they are at liberty to get up and do something. Before three-quarters of the time of the study period is over, most of the study group of children are not seated in their seats; one child may be at the blackboard engaged in some element in penmanship to which his attention has been called. Another may be working on arithmetic, or working on the cards which lie upon the table. Two other children may be playing at an arithmetical game on the blackboard, one child coaching the other.

You will find these little groups around in every corner; there is not a corner of the building where there are not two or three children working together. They sit down together in a cosy way in some corner and work together for 10 or 15 minutes. This method prevents the nervous strain upon the teacher which comes from a crowded room, and which has to be looked after all the time. How to break up the routine work and let the little groups scatter out and do this self-directed work would be the solution of many of the problems of the primary teacher who knows how to provide the children with something worth while, but who is so handicapped by the machinery of the schoolroom that she has no opportunity to free herself from it.

There are any number of ways in which to teach children to move about and "do things" and still be doing things which are associated with the "three R's."

## PROBLEMS OF ADMINISTRATION AND ORGANIZATION.

By JOSEPHINE F. LEACH,

*Director of Apprentice Teaching, Toledo, Ohio.*

The school system of Toledo is trying to devise measures to gain freedom in the primary grades from the administrative standpoint. The average first-grade schoolroom, with its stationary furniture and equipment, all necessary to accommodate the great numbers of beginners, is not fitted for the exercise of school activities.

In a small way this problem has been solved in Toledo. The usual equipment of the primary room consists of 48 or 50 seats. There are not always 50 children. In some of the schools where it is known that the average attendance never reaches 50 the extra seats are removed, thereby giving the first-grade teacher room for the playing of games and circle activities.

The setting aside of a 60-minute handwork period, supervised by the supervisor of art, prevented the class teacher from carrying on the work. Many times the problem for the period was worked out from some central office, and resulted in an activity that was far above primary children from the standpoint of technique. A new distribution of time in the lower grades has done away with this period. A great deal more time is given to handwork, but it is being done as seat work and the motivation for it comes from the other activities of the children.

Again, it is realized that there are different types of children throughout the elementary grades, therefore special grades are being provided, not for deficient children but for the children who are motor-minded and get things more quickly through the muscles than through the eye or ear. These grades have been started, and it is hoped that next year there will be one for the first grade, where all the work of that first grade will center about industrial activities and yet give to these children the same fundamentals that the children in the other type of work are receiving.

Fourthly, it has been found in some of the districts, where conditions are crowded or new buildings are being erected, making half-day sessions for the children necessary, that the teacher worked but half a day with her children and brought the slow ones back three times a week for special work. She then had some time left to go into the homes of the district to visit, and actually accomplished more with this plan than did the teacher who had an all-day session. It was realized that at some point in the all-day session there was a waste of time. Now the upper two-thirds of the first-grade children are dismissed at 10.40 in the morning and the other third remain until 11.30 for helpful work.

When such problems as these are solved from the administrative side of the school system the average primary teacher will cooperate in bringing freedom into her work. But teachers must be brought together and shown what the social motive means. Last year the kindergarten association brought Miss Brown from Teachers College to work a week with the teachers. At the close of the period the primary teachers were asked to see how much of the work could be carried out in the first grade. Every week a group of these teachers met and brought to the conference any project that they were trying.

In some of the foreign districts a doll was placed in the first grade in order to supply the play motive through which might be taught the first laws of hygiene to these children. The children gave the doll a bath and saw that a



child, too, must be bathed once in a while. Now, every teacher who wants to do so is encouraged to have a doll in her first-grade room. And, after all, that is the big thing. *The teacher must want to do it.* The play instinct with the child is so strong and the desire so great that the children immediately begin to sew and dress the doll, and then they make furniture for its home. The first-grade teacher tells with enthusiasm how the children care for the doll, each day dressing it, and each afternoon before school closes getting it ready for the night and putting it to bed. One day a visitor lifted the covers of the little bed and found that the doll had been put to bed without a nightgown. The next morning the teacher asked the little boy who had put the doll to bed about it. She asked: "Why did you put Betty to bed without a nightgown?" He looked at her as if he did not realize what she was talking about. She asked him again, and at last said: "Don't you know that when you go to bed you have on a nightgown?" And the boy replied: "I don't know, for I never had a nightgown."

In addition to solving the problem of greater activity in the primary grades, such experiences reveal the home life of the children and prove to us that to educate boys and girls we must enter into their lives and influence their mode of living as well as teach them five hours each day.

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### OPPORTUNITIES FOR ACTIVITY INHERENT IN THE ORDINARY SCHOOL SUBJECTS.

By ALMA L. BINZEL,

*Director of Practice Teaching, Minneapolis, Minn.*

There should be fuller recognition of the fact that in the older school subjects can also be found occasion for developing social attitudes and habits of cooperation and individual ones of resourcefulness and initiative.

To teach a small group of children in one subject in the elementary department of a normal school is one thing; to teach twice and thrice as many, while an equal number are carrying on study at their seats and to teach them all from 8 to 10 subjects a day in a public school, is a different thing. No wonder the new and young teacher feels somewhat perplexed in her first contact with the school system of a large city. With the five young teachers who came to me this fall without experience other than normal-school student teaching, I tried to emphasize the fundamental necessity of training children to persistent habits of study; to the prompt and good accomplishment of assignments; to the avoidance of dawdling. The time does not permit of any analysis of all that is involved in these three things; but one procedure that has proved effective may be mentioned; it should be added to the excellent things that have already been presented; it is the self-chosen, the self-directed task.

This type of task often takes its form and content from dramatic and constructive activities; it should as often take them from the conventional school materials.

There is no reason why children should not move about freely during their seat study periods in the accomplishment of necessary tasks and with due regard for the rights of other children in recitation work. One young teacher succeeds in freeing children during study periods. While she conducts a recitation with one-half her group, the other half know that newly assigned work must be done first and well; that upon its completion, the worker is at liberty to choose something else. For everyone there is plenty to do either in perfecting some bit of skill, making up some lost time, or forging ahead to new aspects.

The seat study group begins to dissolve. Some go to the wrap hall to engage each other in speeding up in accuracy or time their arithmetic; some go to the storeroom to engage in oral reading; some go to the blackboard to practice penmanship or spelling or arithmetic, each as he feels his greatest need at the time. Frequently the children work in pairs; sometimes the captain of a "pronouncing-down" team coaches a weak member on his side; sometimes a child who thinks he has arrived at mastery asks his neighbor to test him out; sometimes a game is started just for the fun of the game.

A B 3 grade teacher was the first to experiment with this kind of a seat study period. From time to time her opinion of it has been asked. Her first comment was "It makes the order in a room very different from what I expected, but I think it helps the children." She would undoubtedly subscribe to the following as effects of removing unnecessary restraints upon children during seat study periods.

First. It reduces idleness and consequently mischief. Discipline comes through worth-while activity; repressive "don'ts" can be eliminated.

Second. It stimulates all types of children to ambitious attacks upon their own peculiar difficulties.

Third. It reveals the children to themselves and the teacher. It makes her look for the changes in the individual child; it makes her more intelligent as to his limitations and more appreciative of his efforts. She becomes more hopeful and patient; he becomes more persevering and successful.

If the modern movement of measurement has revealed anything important it is that of the varying abilities and achievements of children who are put together and labeled this grade or that, only to find as work is assigned to them each day, that some can not, some can with difficulty, some just can, and some can without exertion, accomplish the task. Any procedure that will aid in adjustment of tasks to individuals is worthy of trial. In the self-chosen, self-directed task there is one help toward such adjustment. It is believed that it aids in cultivating those traits of independence and cooperation which are also among the goals of the newer constructive and dramatic activities of the primary grades.

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## NEEDED IMPROVEMENTS IN ADMINISTRATION AND ORGANIZATION.

By ADA VAN STONE HARRIS,

*Director of Elementary Practice Teaching, Pittsburgh, Pa.*

The principal work which this organization has to do resolves itself largely into a question of organization. A very large percentage of our teachers are eager to do this type of work and are eager to put into their classrooms the broader activity. The majority of the teachers of the country are seeking light and are eager to advance in it, but many of them are working under such highly organized systems that it is quite impossible for them to do this work, even though the desire may be very great.

The large number of pupils per teacher is a serious problem. This organization should labor to reduce the number of pupils per teacher. Teachers do not have enough freedom in their work; they are obliged to do certain amounts of work in a given time. One thing which has confronted me for many years has been, "Well, I must be at such a place at the end of the semester." Teachers must be released from this condition; it must be made possible for chiefs, school

boards, and school principals to recognize these things, and to give the teachers greater freedom. If a teacher has initiative, give her liberty to exercise that initiative.

In the city of Pittsburgh during the past two years movable furniture has been installed in the new school buildings in the first and second grades. There are now from 20 to 35 rooms in Pittsburgh which have such furniture. One-half of each room is furnished with kindergarten tables and chairs, and the other half with movable desks and chairs. In that way a teacher is given freedom for carrying out the various activities.

Teachers must also be granted more freedom in their schedule. A teacher can not do this type of work when she is obliged to follow a time schedule which hangs over her head like an ax, so to speak.